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Do locally unstable structures exist?

Chomsky (to appear) advocates a wholesale abandonment of phrase-structure grammar and its stipulations in favor of a Merge-based grammar. This paradigm shift has a number of non-trivial consequences; most conspicuously, it derides the theory of I-language of any notion of "specifier" and "projection." A consequence, as Chomsky points out, is that in a Merge-based grammar structures are not necessarily endocentric (headed); rather, syntactic objects may or may not receive a label. In this talk, I explore some consequences of this radical new approach, and present a particular case study (split topics), which, so I will argue, sheds some light on the internal workings of the grammar. More specifically, I will argue for an analysis of split topics in terms of a symmetric small clause {DP, NP}, merged in argument/adjunct position, that requires one of its members to be externalized in order to be labeled (in line with original ideas in Moro 2000, now restated in terms of labeling).